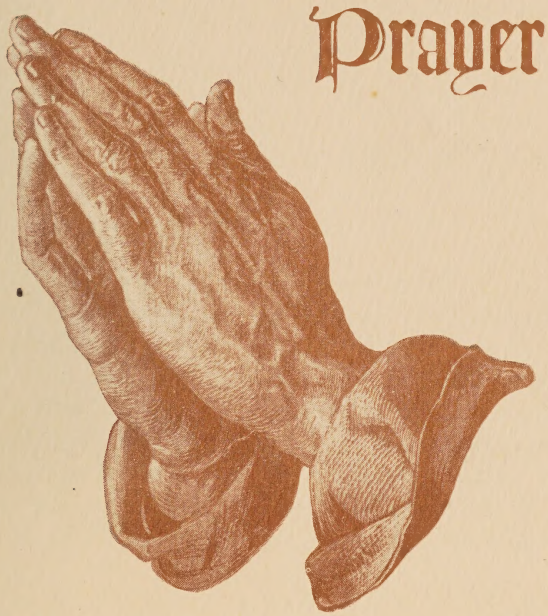
Fellowship in Prayer



"For a world united in prayer"

"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

"And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them..."

Volume IX December, 1958 Number 6

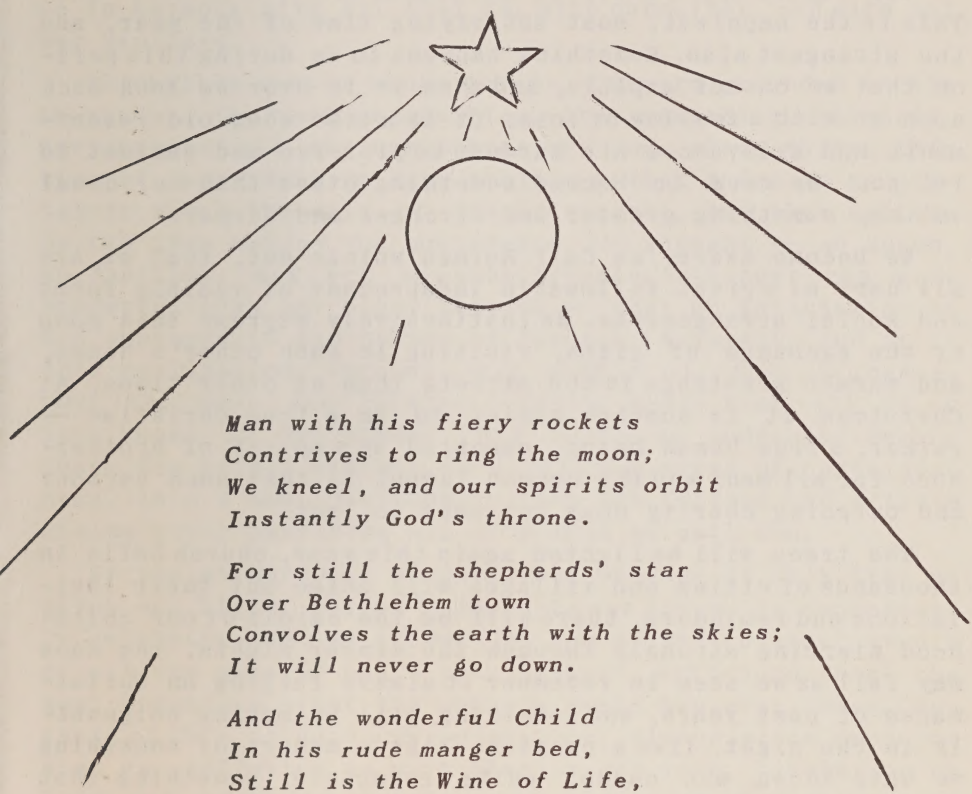
OUR PURPOSE

To promote the practice of prayer among *all* religious faiths whose fundamental belief is in God, regardless of race, creed, or color, and whose tenets include the universal attributes of truth, honesty, justice and mercy, that thereby there may arise a closer relation to Almighty God and a deeper spirit of fellowship among mankind.

FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

22 E. 29th Street New York 16, N.Y.

Volume IX December, 1958 Number 6



Man with his fiery rockets
Contrives to ring the moon;
We kneel, and our spirits orbit
Instantly God's throne.

For still the shepherds' star
Over Bethlehem town
Convolves the earth with the skies;
It will never go down.

And the wonderful Child
In his rude manger bed,
Still is the Wine of Life,
The immortal Bread.

— A. E. Johnson.

A MESSAGE FOR CHRISTMAS

The wonder and mystery of Christmas are with us once more. This is the happiest, most satisfying time of the year, and the strangest also. Something happens to us during this period that we cannot explain, and when it is over we look back upon it with a feeling of loss. It is a time when old resentments and grievances are hardest to preserve and easiest to let go. We seem to become something other than our usual selves, something greater and stronger and deeper.

We become aware, as Carl Holmes points out, that we are all part of a great fellowship independent of visible forms and social arrangements. We instinctively express this mood by the exchange of gifts, visiting in each other's homes, and warmer greetings in the streets than at other times. At Christmas it is somehow easier to be a true Christian — rather, a true human being, ennobled by a spirit of brotherhood for all men; and the common lament is that such harmony and outgoing charity does not seem to last.

The trees will be lighted again this year, church bells in thousands of cities and villages will chime out their invitations and reminders, there will be the carols of our childhood piercing strongly through the winter nights, the snow may fall as we seem to remember it always falling on Christmases of past years, and something will be moving poignantly in the night, like a promise, like a memory of something we have known and cannot quite recapture, something that touches the deepest chords in us, mysterious and not to be expressed. It will come to us between the rounds of visits in cheerful living rooms, or after the last long note from a group of street carolers has faded in the frosty air; mostly it will come to us when we are alone—on Christmas night, or Christmas Eve perhaps. Nostalgia and some undefinable longing will seize us once again; we will remember things we thought we had forgotten; old scenes, lost voices, the faces of long ago—they will all come back to us. A hush will seem to possess the world, a secret, enfolding silence working invisibly in the depths of our beings, stirring our souls to something like muted ecstasy, opening hidden and neglected recesses of our minds to sudden intuitions, moments of enlightenment and enveloping peace.

We all remember these moments and they will come again this year. There will be a time for all of us when we will be in harmony with all that is, with ourselves, and with all our brothers.

Intangible as such moods may be, they are grounded in the knowledge, the awed recognition, that something extraordinary beyond all our comprehension took place during this time of year. William Hung reminds us that there is no certainty about the date of its occurrence, but what matters is the idea *behind* the occurrence; the thought — so known, so familiar, and yet so unbelievable, stranger and more wonderful than any other thought — that an incarnation of God appeared in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. And it is this realization, working deep within us, that brings about the rare and knowledge-giving moods that all of us have known at Christmas; that leads us suddenly, during these few bright radiant days, into new areas of consciousness, into a new relationship with our fellows and with the divine power pervading all life that we call God.

We are at our best at Christmas because at this time we allow our higher selves to dominate our lives. We consciously celebrate and pay tribute to one of the colossal events of all the ages of man's long history, and beyond doubt the most momentous event the western world has ever known. Because of this tribute and recognition, divine grace descends upon us, suffusing us with charity and love, liberating us from our usual weaknesses; and giving us a foretaste of greater illuminations, here or elsewhere, yet to come.

Those of us who have discovered the spiritual realm know that without the lives and inspiration of great master-spirits like Jesus we would be lost, we would remain in fatal bondage to our fears and desires and our innumerable weaknesses, we would drown in darkness and hopelessness. Such a life empowers us with the faith that because such a person actually *was*, then there is a God, there is a way out for us, and all that the prophets and saints have told us for so long must be true.

Therefore let us hope that some of us will keep vigil this Christmas Eve, praying and fasting and remembering, for all the rest of us who may forget.

JOYFULNESS

THE TRUE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

By Harry Halsey Starrett

At this hallowed season of Christmas, the keynote is joyfulness. Upon this Holy Advent, the angel of the Lord appeared and spoke the word which reverberated around the world—"Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people."

Joyfulness is one of the fruits of spirit, and in any plan to bring about world unity and peace nothing contributes more to this end than does the divine attribute of joyfulness. Joyfulness draws and holds men together in a common bond of brotherhood; joyfulness dissolves shadows and brings all men together, in the sunshine of Eternal Day; joyfulness helps man to understand the oneness of all life and to live in the glorious fulness of that One Life, by becoming one with it; that One Life which is centered in God—which *is* God.

When our hearts become a manger in which the Christ child is born, joyfulness will fill our whole being and shine through us out into the world, lifting others up out of the unreal into the real; out of darkness into light; out of mortality into immortality.

The manger in which the Christ child was born is the symbol of joyfulness, humility, lowliness, peace and good will, which He came to teach us. One of the greatest lessons to be learned from the lowly birth of our Lord and Master is that Mastership is lowliness enthroned. Let him who would become Master, first become a good and faithful servant.

May we all learn well the lesson of Joyfulness that, as we move about among our fellow creatures, we may bring sunshine where there is darkness, gladness where there is sorrow; that we may being hope to the hopeless, faith to the faithless; that we may bring peace where there is strife, love where there is hatred; and forgiveness where there is vindictiveness...that the Living Christ may be born anew in the hearts of all men.

* * *

THE SEASON OF GIVING

By Carl Holmes

In Dickens' famous story "A Christmas Carol" old Scrooge asked his nephew, "What is Christmas?" His nephew replied, "I have always thought of Christmas-time when it has come around - apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin - as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time in the long calendar of the year when men and women seem by one consent, to open their shut-in hearts, freely - and I say - God bless it!"

In the hustle and bustle of shopping and the pressures of the season, we are apt to overlook the true spirit of Christmas reflected in the attitudes of our families, neighbors and friends.

Christmas is a reminder of the fact that the world is essentially not an economic world, but a world peopled by human beings. It helps us to feel the supremacy of a genuine fellowship pervading our common life, the source of which is the gift to the world of the Life whose birth we celebrate on Christmas day.

At this season of the year, people who are often a bundle of contradictions are in common motivated by sentiment and generosity. It is a time when we are at our best, when we have good will in our hearts toward all men.

The Christmas spirit has come down through the centuries, borne by happy families around lighted Christmas trees; carried on the wings of carols; passed on in familiar greetings from the hearts of men and women of good will.

There are some things we would like to give and cannot afford. But all of us can give friendship to those who need it; loyalty to our employer and those who depend upon us; courtesy to strangers; kindness to those whose paths may cross ours; understanding to those whose views may differ from our own. These are the gifts that cannot be purchased, but are the gifts that will last all year through.

Yes, I believe that Christmas is the best season of the year. It is then, more than at any other time, that we embrace the spirit of giving and learn the truth of Jesus' statement, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

* * *

WHAT THEY SAID ABOUT JESUS

By Rev. Roy Wallace Thomas

If all the sermons, essays and books written about Jesus down through the centuries could be accumulated in one place, they would fill a large library. In my own large file of notes, references, clippings, etc., concerning the things that have most interested me, my most voluminous folder is labelled "Jesus." From this I wish to present several quotations that I regard as significant.

Lyman Abott, a noted religious journalist and Congregational leader of his day, wrote in his "Letters to Unknown Friends": "My faith in God rests on my faith in Christ as God manifest in the flesh — not as God *and* man, but as God *in* man."

Henry Van Dyke called Jesus' supreme demonstration "the human life of God."

Mary Austin, novelist, essayist and poet, confessed: "I seek to ground my religious life on what Jesus himself believed, and not on what is believed about him."

George Barker Stevens, Protestant minister and professor at Yale, wrote at the turn of the century: "I find the gospel, in Jesus himself, presented with a clarity, a simplicity, a transcendent beauty and matchless power nowhere equalled."

Among the most brilliant followers of Jesus of the last century was Phillips Brooks, for over twenty years rector of the famous Trinity Episcopal Church in Boston, and author of "O Little Town of Bethlehem." His wonderful summary of Jesus' life is well known, but at this season of the year it deserves to be read again:

"Here is a man who was born in an obscure village, child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another obscure village. He worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty, and then for three years he was an itinerant preacher. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never owned a home. He never had a family. He never went to college. He never put his foot inside a big city. He never travelled two hundred miles from the place where he was born. He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but himself.

"While still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. One of them denied him. Another betrayed him. He

was turned over to his enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed upon a cross between two thieves. His executioners gambled for the only piece of property he had on earth while he was dying, and that was his coat. When he was dead, he was taken down and laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

"Nineteen wide centuries have come and gone and today he is the center of the human race and the leader of the column of progress. I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that were ever built, and all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has this *one solitary life.*"

Such is some of the guidance that has helped many a bewildered student find his way to the light that still shines from the manger of Bethlehem.

* * *

O little town of Bethlehem,

How still we see thee lie;

Above thy deep and dreamless sleep

The silent stars go by;

Yet in thy dark streets shineth

The everlasting light;

The hopes and fears of all the years

Are met in thee tonight.

Some say, that ever 'gainst that season comes,
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
The bird of dawning singeth all night long,
And then, they say no spirit can walk abroad,
So hallow'd and so gracious is the time.

— *Shakespeare.*

THOUGHTS ON A GOD-MAN

By Swami Ritajananda

Blessed indeed is the day which is considered sacred by millions of people. It commemorates the birth of a person remembered with reverence. Millions have been born on December 25, but none of them have left their mark. They are not even remembered by their own descendants. They might have been powerful monarchs, but where is their kingdom? They might have been great men of culture, yet who thinks of them? But the dates of birth of Incarnations of God are sacred. If there is in us any strong desire for attaining perfection, if there is any ideal to be achieved, these great personalities are ever stretching their hands to us. Whether people consider them as incarnations or not, they stand as brilliant beacon lights in the history of humanity, they serve as shining examples of the height people can reach. It is this point worth remembering. We should study them not as individuals shaped by circumstances alone, but as examples of how perfection is reached.

Life for most of us is a struggle. It is a struggle for getting the needs of existence, needs for thought and needs for inner peace. There are very few who have reached a state of real inner peace and joy, and practically none who could feel at home with all people, making no distinctions as to race or religion. The expanded heart and the tremendous power that admits into its bosom the sinner and the saint are rarely to be seen.

But, as if to show this is not an impossibility, we come across great masters like Buddha, Jesus and, in our own time, Ramakrishna, the God-man of modern India. What is it they have done? What is the force behind their life that attracts all of us?

From the early sacred literature of India we are informed that whenever there is the disappearance of virtue and the manifestation of vice, the Lord incarnates. It is not controlled by us. Nobody can foretell where He will come, how He will live and what He will preach. It is all in His hands. From the start there is a marked difference between him and others. Not even his parents give us a clue as to the nature of their son. If they become great, we understand it only later. They are like arrows shot towards a target. They go straight. There are

no misgivings, no doubts or anxieties. Their road is clear to them.

Early in life they enter a period of search for God. They fight with temptations. They find, some time later, that they have got what they wanted. They discover that they are backed by a revelation. Buddha did not even call it God. But he touched that experience. When we consider the path Buddha placed before his people, it has the same features as that laid down by others. When the path is the same, we can conclude that the termination of it is also the same.

From the very beginning Jesus had a deep conviction about his nature. When he was a boy he was found to have much interest in religious discussions and he was treated by the scholars with admiration because of his extraordinary capacity to understand and interpret the scriptures. Then came the next period of his spiritual life—a period of intense austerities, as we can judge from the available material. He left his people and for many years no one knew where he was or what he was doing. He might have lived in a monastery or wandered far, in the wilderness. His spiritual life is very little known to us. Except for the arrival of the devil and his tempting Jesus with worldly gifts, we have no idea about his struggles and practices. There is no information about the austerities he underwent. He never talked about them, for it was not himself that he wanted to have accepted. He wanted to establish the Kingdom of Heaven, and so he made himself a fit person to do that.

He returned to the world as a completely transformed person. The life he had led gave him the power to preach. He was able to speak like someone with authority. No one could dare oppose him. Everybody who wanted to overcome him by their intellect had to listen to him. The way he talked shows how powerful he was, and the manner in which people gathered around him to listen to his words. Of these some became disciples. They are so struck by his personality they go with him wherever he went, and never considered about their personal needs or comforts. It is a great blessing that we have his teachings well preserved. They give us a very clear picture of the great personality he was. It is really strange how he could draw people who were not intellectually equipped to understand the implications of his teachings.

Religion is not a matter to be established by argument. *Great souls do not teach religion, they give it.* They take human beings at their own levels and give them a push forward. If it were not so, how could Simon, the simple fisherman, whose life was confined to meeting the needs of his family, become the great Saint Peter? How could such transformations take place?

So we find that Christ was not surrounded by learned men, but common folk, extremely simple in their life. But they had the great possession, that which can even shake mountains, *faith.* It is always the simple people who seek the gates of heaven, and their knocks are more readily answered. Just think of Mary Magdalene, of her recognition of the greatness of Christ, and her wholehearted surrender to him. When we study closely these mighty characters, our hearts melt with admiration. They all show us the way to something great.

Faith as the most important condition of spiritual life - Christ stresses this point again and again. If people have faith then they can shake the whole world by their power. We find he had to rebuke his disciples a number of times for their lack of faith in him.

Absolutely simple in his life, he had not even a home to take shelter in, and nobody who was his own. He lived a celibate life, for he had chosen that life for God. It has been the practice of all the great teachers of the world. They wanted to have no particular obligation. They felt that they should have the whole world as their family, and not just a few people who would depend on them. He just impressed this idea, that if a person had faith in God he would never have any want. Recall his beautiful teaching: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul and with all thy mind."

More than everything else, it is the show of divine grace by which Jesus Christ comes to the hearts of us all. He did not curse people who had fallen and he did not blame them for their life. He extends his loving hand and says, Repent and start a new life. There is hope. Once the heart is purified you will be saved. The Lord is eager for the welfare of the son who has gone astray. It is the fallen and down-trodden who want hope and joy. It is their aching hearts that are to be healed. This is the message of hope. If we walk one step the Lord walks ten steps towards us. How many people have turned new leaves in their lives by this one

teaching! He never tried to use high flown language to impress his audience. Simple direct statements. Blessed are the pure in heart. They shall see God. Purity is the watchword. Free the mind from all impurities, then perfection is at your door.

But the flesh is weak. So, we forget. And hence the need of these God-men.

"THE BEST RELIGION"

By Charles Wagner

(Charles Wagner was an outstanding preacher at the turn of the century. The following is an excerpt from his best known essay.)

I may be asked to tell, in a few plain words, which is the best religion....But perhaps one ought not to lay down the question as ordinarily done, by asking which is the best? Undoubtedly, religions have precise characteristics, and good parts and faulty ones are inherent in each. On pressure one may compare them, but such comparison is always mixed up with ingrained opinion or involuntary partiality. It would be better to....ask: "Is my religion good and how can I tell if it be so?" The reply to that is as follows:

"Your religion is good if vital and active; if it cherishes in you the feeling for the infinite worth of existence; if it be the ally of your better part against the worse and, without pause, makes it appear that you should become a new man; if it makes you aware that woe is a deliverance; if it augments in you respectfulness towards other consciences; if it makes you forgive more freely, your happiness less puffed up, your duty more dear and the outlook less darksome—if this be so, your religion is good, whatever its name. However rudimentary it is...it proceeds from the authentic source—it binds you to God and man.

"But does it serve to make you believe you are better than others, to squabble about the texts, to...lord it over other consciences or yield your own to slavery; to soothe your scruples, to practice a creed by fashion and interest, or to do good because it will be repaid beyond the grave—then, though you invoke Buddha, Moses, Mahomet, or Christ himself, your religion is worthless, for it parts you from God and man."

THE SECRET OF JOY

By W. J. Thompson, D. D.

When the newly-elected President of a ministerial association began his year of office, a photographer was called to take his picture. Addressing the new leader, the photographer said, "And now, sir, please sit over here, and look solemn!" The startled minister inquired, "Why do you ask me to look solemn?" The photographer replied, "It is usual for one in your profession to look solemn, isn't it?"

As I read this story I recalled the statement: "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." *(Rom. 14:17)*

There are many Biblical passages in both the Old and New Testaments emphasizing joy as an essential part of the spiritual life, crowned with the statement of Jesus to his disciples, at a time when dark shadows gathered around Him, "These things have I spoken unto you that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." *(John 15:11)*

We certainly should not ignore or minimize the sorrow and trouble in the world, but we do need to stress the joy that comes as the result of faith in God, with its power to overcome fear and dispel despair.

In the Old Testament we read, "The joy of the Lord is your strength." *(Nehemiah 8:10)*

Thousands of men and women can testify to the truth of this statement. You may tell me that you would like to have this joyous attitude toward life, but it seems too difficult in your case. I reply with a simple story:

A father was working in his garden, when his small daughter asked if she might help him. He told her to water the lawn with a nearby rubber hose. Matters went along fine for a time, until suddenly the little girl cried in dismay, "Daddy, the water has stopped!" Her father looked in her direction and said quietly, "Honey, take your foot off the hose." The child had unwittingly placed her foot on the soft rubber hose, shutting off the water she needed. The moment she obeyed her father's instructions the water came through, and she resumed her work of watering the lawn.

Here is my advice to all who complain of their inability to obtain the joy of the Lord—"Take your foot off the hose!" Let God's gift of gladness

flow through you to others. Thus wonderful joy shall come into your life. It all comes back to the question of the individual response. There is no doubt about God's ability or willingness to give you abiding joy. The real problem is whether you will believe this and act upon it.

A modern philosopher tells us: "The man who goes around complaining about everything, wishing he had never been born, will find a lot of people ready to agree with him!"

There is nothing attractive or helpful about pessimism, but there is genuine inspiration and uplift in spiritual optimism. H. W. Mabie wrote:

"There are individuals who invigorate us by simple contact.
We never leave them without a sense of increased hope and joy.
Something escapes from them of which they are not aware,
And which we cannot describe, but it affects us greatly,
Giving a wonderful feeling of spiritual buoyancy and joy."

A young man once left the presence of Phillips Brooks without asking him the question he had come to present. He explained, "I do not care about that now. I found out that what I needed was not the solution of a problem, but the contagion of a triumphant spirit."

Julius Rosenwald declares: "All other pleasures in life seem to wear out after awhile, but the joy of helping others stays with us always."

In order to possess the finest and most lasting joy, we must first turn to God, the Source of such joy, and then we must share it with others.

Helen Keller, bound by physical limitations that seemed at first utterly hopeless, has yet made such a magnificent triumph of her life that her words on "The Secret of Joy" carry special conviction. She says: "Join the company of those who make the barren places of life fruitful with kindness; carry a vision of heaven in your soul, and make your home, your work, your entire life, correspond to that vision. Your success and happiness lie within you. The great realities are God, and love, and service. Joy is the holy fire that keeps our purpose warm and our intelligence aglow! The Psalmist gives us the secret of joy in Psalm 16:11, 'In Thy presence is fulness of joy.' Take from His Divine Hand the gift of joy, and through that gift bring inspiration and blessing to others."

"We feel and know that we are eternal." — Spinoza.

A M E D I

O Gracious Lord, I enter Thy radiance and approach Thy presence, bearing with me the service done in Thy Name and for Thee. I seek to become a more efficient server and I open my heart and mind to the power of Thy Love and Thy Joy and Thy Peace.

In Thy presence, Thy Love floods my being -- Love which is gentleness, kindness, helpfulness. *I must therefore be loving, gentle, kind and helpful to all men.*

In Thy presence, Thy Joy pervades me -- Joy which is light, radiance and eternal youth. *I must therefore bear Thy Joy to those who are sad and depressed.*

In Thy presence, Thy Peace enfolds me and fills me with contentment, certainty, rest, stillness -- Thy Peace which passeth understanding. *I must therefore be a center of love, joy and peace in the world.*

I place my hand in Thine with all love and trust and confidence, for Thou art indeed my Lord. *From the unreal lead me to the Real; from darkness to Light; from death to Life Eternal.*

A T I O N

At Thy feet and in the Light of Thy Holy Presence, I strive to realize what I am. *I am not this body which belongs to the world of shadows; I am not the desires which affect it; I am not the thoughts which fill my mind; I am not the mind itself.*

I am the Divine Flame within my heart; eternal, immortal, ancient, without beginning, without end. More radiant than the sun in all his noonday glory, purer than the snow, untouched, unsullied by the hand of matter. *More subtle than the ether, is the Spirit within my heart. I and my Father are one.*

I worship Thee; I adore Thee -- Thou my life, my Breath, my Being, my All. I am in Thee and Thou art in me. *Lead me, O Gracious Lord, through Thy illimitable Love to union with Thee and the Heart of Eternal Love.*

In Thy Love, I rest for evermore.

(This Meditation, suggested by Harry H. Starrett, appeared in Geoffrey Hodson's THUS HAVE I HEARD, published in 1930 by the Theosophical Publishing House, Madras, India. Its original source was "The Aquarian Age," May-June, 1924. We reprint it with the kind permission of Mr. Hodson.)

WHEN WAS JESUS BORN?

By William Hung

A sense of shock and disappointment was my first reaction when I learned that Jesus could not have been born in A.D. 1. According to both St. Matthew and St. Luke he was born when King Herod was alive, but according to historical chronology Herod had died in 4 B.C. The Christian chronology was thus not only wrong regarding the year of Jesus' birth, it was also mistaken regarding the day of its occurrence, because Palestinian weather on December 25 would not have permitted shepherds and sheep in the open field as portrayed in St. Luke's gospel.

The day was of course arbitrarily chosen for a festive occasion and the year erroneously computed by a medieval scholar. While December 25, A.D. 1 can thus be easily brushed aside, the question remains: When was Jesus born?

A modern theory tries to explain St. Matthew's story of the Star of Bethlehem and the wise men from the East with the aid of astronomy. The conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation Pisces three times during 7 B.C. might have appeared in the heavens as a new, singular star on May 29, October 3, and December 4. As the journey of the wise men was not likely to have taken so long as the four months between May 29 and October 3, it might have been the planets in conjunction on December 4 that had led them from Jerusalem to visit the babe in a *house* in Bethlehem. The visit of the shepherds to the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in the *manger* might have occurred a month or more before December, before the sheep were off the grazing fields. Indeed, the placing of Jesus' birth in the autumn of 7 B.C. would not contradict the mention of King Herod. Nor would it conflict with St. Luke's mentioning Cyrenius (Quirinius in the revised versions) and the first census; for, according to Tertullian, there was a census under Proconsul Saturninus about 7 B.C. and, according to a fragment of an inscription in Antioch, Cyrenius was then the Roman legate.

Thus the Biblical account of the Nativity is not without demonstrable historicity, which might be likened to the hidden roots of a plant, discoverable after laborious digging. The branches, leaves, flowers, berries, color, and

fragrance - the things that really matter - are comparable to the later growths of the Christmas story: prophecy and poetry, majesty and tenderness. It might be difficult to substantiate the appearance of angels; for, as Boris Pasternak, Russia's Nobel Prize-winning poet, puts into Dr. Zhivago's poem, "The Star of the Nativity": *"Their incorporeality made them invisible, yet each step they took left the print of a foot."*

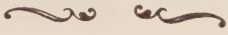
It may be interesting to note that the concurrence of Christmastide with the Roman "Dies Natalis Invicti" — the counterpart of ancient China's winter solstice festival, a season of holidays, of family reunion, and of gift-giving — and the further accumulation of folklore and pageantry through the centuries are symbolic of its growth in universality. The hope for peace and order, the joy of love and friendship, the appeal of beauty and goodness, the unity of man and God: are these not also angelic footprints on the fields of experience? Therefore, should adult skepticism be considered superior to childlike belief, it may be well to remember Jesus' prayer: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."

The death of Christ is a great mystery; but His birth is even a greater. That He should live a human life at all is stranger than that, so living, He should die a human death. I can scarce get past His cradle in my wondering, to wonder at His cross. The infant Jesus is, in some views, a greater marvel than Jesus with the purple robe and the crown of thorns.

— Crichton.

May the wicked become virtuous,
May the virtuous obtain tranquillity,
May the tranquil become free from bonds,
May the freed make others free.

— Old Hindu Chant.



HANUKKAH

By Rabbi Myron B. Movsky

The Festival of Lights will begin on December 7th. The holiday of Hanukkah had its beginning more than two thousand years ago (168 B.C.) when the Syrian emperor, Antiochus, captured the Temple at Jerusalem. In the Temple of the one God he put pagan idols.

The Jewish people, who treasured their religious freedom, revolted against the emperor. For three years a small but brave force of Jewish patriots heroically battled against a mighty Syrian army. These patriots were led in their battle for freedom by Judah the Maccabee and his four brothers, the sons of the priest Mattathias.

It is recorded in the First Book of Maccabees that Judah addressed his army thus before the final battle: "Gird yourselves and acquit yourselves like brave men. Be ready early in the morning to fight these heathen who have gathered against us to destroy us and our sanctuary, because it is better for us to die in battle than to look upon the tragedies of our nation and our sanctuary. But whatever be the will in Heaven, thus shall He do." In 165 B.C. they at last won the victory and drove the Syrian pagans out of the Temple and Jerusalem. Afterwards, Judah removed the idols, cleansed the Temple, and made it once again a place for the worship of God. This dedication was celebrated for eight days by prayer and song. That is why the Jews today celebrate the festival of Hanukkah (which means "dedication") for eight days. The holiday is observed in the month of December because it was at that time of year that the victory and the first Hanukkah took place.

The holiday, mentioned in John 10:22 as the "Feast of Dedication," is also known as the "Feast of Lights" because of the custom of lighting candles on each of the eight holiday nights. These are lit because of the miracle which is said to have taken place when the Temple was recaptured from the Syrians. When the pagans were driven from the Temple, only a small jar of holy oil - just enough for one day - was left behind. But this tiny jar of oil burned for eight days and nights until new oil could be made with which to fill the sacred lamps. Besides reminding Jewish children of this story, the holiday candles stand for the light of free-

dom and liberty won by Judah the Maccabee and his brave army.

Hanukkah is a happy festival. It is the custom to give gifts to the children and to hold merry family and community gatherings during the week of Hanukkah. The big event on Hanukkah is the candle-lighting ceremony. The father lights the candles each evening just after nightfall in the presence of the entire family. A prayer of thanks to God for His miracles and loving-kindness is recited as the candles are lit. Then the Hanukkah story is retold to the children.

On the first evening a single candle is lit; the number is increased by one on each evening, until the last night when the full eight are kindled.

The hymn "Ma'oz Tsur (Rock of Ages)" is often sung in both home and synagogue after the lighting of the candles.

Rock of Ages, let our song praise
Thy saving power;
Thou, amidst the raging foes, wast
our shelt'ring tower.
Furious they assailed us, but Thine
arm availed us,
And Thy word broke their sword
When our own strength failed us.

Kindling new the holy lamps, priests
who had been suffering,
Purified the nation's shrine, brought
to God their offering.
And His courts surrounding, hear, in
joy abounding,
Happy throngs, singing songs, with
a mighty sounding.

Special prayers of thanksgiving, as well as the Hallel (Psalms 113-118), are recited in the synagogue each day of the festival.

SPECIAL CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS IN THE MORAVIAN CHURCH

By Rev. David Henkelmann

The Moravian Church, or *unitas Fratrum* as it is known around the world, had its beginning some five hundred years ago in 1457 among the followers of John Hus, the Czech patriot-reformer who was burned at the stake as a heretic for his reformation ideas.

The Moravian Church has always remained small and been known for its missionary activity and its Christmas customs. In fact, in many places its members have received the name of "the Christmas people." Many of their customs such as Candle Services and

"The Putz"(miniature Christmas scene) would not be considered unique any more, but it is to be remembered that these customs are centuries old among the Moravians.

The festivities begin with the first Sunday in Advent, when the Advent wreath appears in the church. It is a wreath made of greens and cones, in which are placed four tall candles. One candle is lighted on the first Sunday in Advent and each succeeding Sunday finds an additional candle lighted. Also the "Moravian Star" appears. A large many-pointed star which is carefully preserved from year to year, it is hung in the church and appears in the halls and on the porches of many Moravian homes. This custom dates back to 1850.

As the Christmas season advances, the 'Putz' is built in many churches and homes. The word 'putz' merely means "a decoration," but Moravians mean a specific decoration. It is a reconstruction in miniature of the events of the first Christmas. Its figures are often heirlooms, hand-carved pieces; at other times they are just the dime store variety - but they are set in hillsides of moss and real 'trees'. The larger putzes which are generally open to view for friends and visitors alike will have each area separately lit; and as the gospel narratives are read, one will visually move from shepherds to angels to wise men to manger.

Christmas is climaxed by the Christmas Eve Vigils, probably the original candle-light service. Each worshipper receives a bees-wax candle which has been decorated with a paper frill. The candles are distributed while a traditional hymn is sung, "Morning Star, O Cheering Sight." This hymn is sung by a child who is answered antiphonally by the congregation and one is soon swept up into the joy of knowing that again a child is born...which is Christ the Lord.

Had I but served my God with half the zeal
I served my king, He would not in mine age
Have left me naked to mine enemies.

— Shakespeare.

Book Review

BLESS THIS DAY, A Book of Prayers for Children, compiled by Elfrida Vipont and illustrated by Harold Jones; Harcourt Brace & Co., 1958; about 90 pp; $3.25.

Elfrida Vipont and Harold Jones are both well-known in the field of children's books, and justly so. They have done a charming and effective job of collaboration in BLESS THIS DAY, a book of prayers for children, filled with superb illustrations, more than a third of them in color. This is a book that should appeal to almost any boy or girl between eight and fifteen. Miss Vipont has drawn the prayer selections from both Catholic and Protestant writers, some of whom are famous names in literature, and from both modern and ancient sources. The selections are divided into a dozen categories—

"Prayers for Waking,"
"Prayers for Others,"
"Prayers for Guidance,"
"Prayers for Bedtime," and so on. This phase of the book is handled very well and leaves little to be desired.

But it is the illustrations that make or mar such a book; almost always its appeal and effectiveness lean most heavily on the pictures that accompany the text. In this instance Mr. Jones is eminently satisfactory. His children look out of these pages with elfin, gently stricken expressions on their faces; sadly and nostalgically they stare out at us, unseeing, their inward gaze fixed on half-remembered scenes they have known somewhere. They sing carols and their eyes appear lost, their attention elsewhere; they enter church like angelic strangers with their minds faraway, bemused, moving in a timeless dimension of their own, one which we all knew once; they walk in the fields as in a dream, accompanied by their dogs, and they seem a part of everything that grows and moves and breathes around them.

And we see lovely vistas of the English countryside, flowering trees and sloping green hills and winding rows of hedges; and mild animals of all kinds—subdued elephants, listening fawn, meek dogs, horses with soft, knowing eyes. Everything is as it should be in a book of this kind—everything is as it once was, long ago, in some other world....

Adults who have discovered the beauty and wonder of prayer would do well to keep this book in mind when they ponder the problem of a suitable gift for some sensitive child of their acquaintance.

Book Review

REALITY AND PRAYER, by John B. Magee; Harper, 1958, 239 pp; $3.50.

This is an earnest, spirited, often brilliant book by a man passionately interested in the most important of all subjects. It is likely to be found inadequate by seekers of God who long for spiritual realizations in this very life; but for most reflective, searching individuals John Magee's REALITY AND PRAYER is bound to be of service.

The book is tightly written with little of the vagueness and sentimentality that weaken the impact of so many books in this field. The sentences march forward through a score of different subjects and the author handles each of them in the same sure and knowledgeable fashion. In a short introduction Leslie Weatherhead, the London minister, claims originality for Mr. Magee's book, which in all honesty is questionable in a field where many minds, some of them great minds, have ventured. Still, the author gives us some penetrating intuitions into the truths of the spirit--for example, when he says that the man of deep prayer is "the only one who can give and receive love without guilt."

On this same theme he has important comments on the resources of men of prayer when subjected to the totalitarian processes of "brain-washing." They were able to withstand their insidious effects because the deeper areas of their minds, purged and fortified by long years of prayer and meditation, remained unaffected by all external pressures, however sinister. "Recorded on our nervous system and in our subconscious are all the impressions received throughout our lives ..... Through mental prayer, by taking command of this conditioning process and feeding the mind a judiciously selected diet of concepts, values and attitudes, we can largely determine the person we are to become...The man who believes that only in the human brain do purpose.... and truth live, will discover no sure rock upon which to rest his being when his own poor brain is being filled with fantasies and madness...."

Mr. Magee paints a good picture of the modern world as it impinges on the consciousness of a sensitive person, and he shows us what psychology and science have done to alter man's concept of the universe and his own society. There is a chapter called "Science, Law and Prayer"

which, as Dr. Weatherhead says, is an outstanding survey and analysis, in brief compass, of this vital area. He then proceeds to examine various aspects and conditions of prayer. Much of it is moving, and all of it is presented with great clarity and succinctness.

Probably the most stimulating chapter is one called "Petition and God's Creativity," which should be of great interest to literary and artistic people especially. He cites men who have made studies of the conditions under which creative moments in art may be evoked, with testimonies included by artists themselves, and suggests that such moments "may be an intimation of what we may expect when we are overshadowed by His Holy Presence." "—We should consider prayer as the highest form of creation within the highest environment for creation...Prayer is putting oneself at the complete disposal of the supreme Will which is forever reweaving patterns of existence into the most perfect possible work of art." There are many such precise and reflective passages.

Only in the last two chapters, where the subject is mental prayer, meditation and communion with God, does the book lapse. The compact, swift-moving style and confident approach, which served effectively in the earlier chapters, is the very thing that serves him ill in a field where a more measured and subtle approach is indispensable. Many believe the mystical life is the highest life conceivable to man and the mystical experience the deepest and most illuminating that the human soul can know. In any case, writing of the mystical levels of prayer and meditation is a hazardous task for most writers, so that when Mr. Magee says, "I believe that the fullest union toward which we should look is larger than that described by most of the mystics," one is seized with strong reservations. In the same chapter he makes the remarkable comment that "spiritual experiences must be recognized as by-products of a more serious enterprise." This enterprise he sums up as a growth in charity and selflessness toward our fellow men. But from the mystics we hear that the kind of charity and selflessness Jesus and Paul were talking about is in a last analysis impossible without the transforming power which authentic spiritual experience alone can imbue into us.

Book Review

THE RELIGIONS OF MAN, by Huston Smith; Harper, 1958, 328 pp; $5.00.

Books interpreting religions other than Christianity are seldom completely satisfactory, unless one demands the satisfaction of finding other religions suffer in comparison with the Christian faith. Even when the writers of these books declare that they will avoid invidious comparisons, they almost always make them. The *queerness* and *naivity* of other religions, and the attendant superiority of Christianity, are themes traditionally preserved by such writers. Either their tone is frankly critical and patronizing, or when they seem to be more objective they will usually contrive to show the religion under study as clearly inferior, or puzzling.

None of this applies to Huston Smith's THE RELIGIONS OF MAN, one of the most significant books to be published in recent years on any subject, and probably the finest in the field of comparative religion of this century.

It is difficult to point out the primary virtue in this book of many virtues. The author's style is wonderful for his purpose: lucid, varied, subtle — a dynamic, plunging style of writing. His felicitous choice of quotations that light up the pages is also remarkable. (For example, this sentence from Aldous Huxley describing the condition of the mind when it first confronts religion seriously: "There comes a time when one asks even of Shakespeare, even of Beethoven—is this all?") And his knowledge of his subject is vast, encyclopedic, intimately handled. But perhaps the thing that stands out most is the quality and coloration of his mind, its marvelous balance and power of judgment—a mind uniquely suited to this undertaking.

As he treats each of the great world faiths he is astonishingly able to forget his own religious views, whatever they may be. "If God is a God of love," he writes, "it seems most unlikely that he would not have revealed himself to his other children as well." Reading each chapter, one feels that the religion under examination is the most exciting and *truthful* of all. The author's empathy, his entering into the spirit and atmosphere of each religion, is simply amazing. A parallel would be difficult to find in any field and, as far as we

know, there is none in this field at all.

In a brilliant one-line summary of one aspect of religion, the author underscores his own passionate dedication to the subject: "Authentic religion is the clearest opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos can pour into human existence." One by one, he takes us to the heart of these great religions, what they were in the beginning when their founders were still able to control their development, and what in essence, under all the accretions of power and compromise, they still are. He places himself at the center of each religion's hidden meaning—what it was the purpose of its original prophet to promulgate to the world.

When discussing the foundation of Buddhism, for example, he says that Buddha saw all life as grounded in suffering. Mr. Smith does not (in the light of Western thinking) question this, suggest a gratuitous premise, and thus give us an outsider's view. Nor does he locate Buddha's reasoning in the social and economic dislocation of the India of his time. Instead, with the air of a man discovering these great altitudes of human thought for the first time and anxious to bring others along with him, he plunges headlong into the thinking and *mystique* of Buddha and the religion he founded, restlessly eager to pluck from its ancient source the essence of its meaning. He does this, unbelievably, with each of the great faiths in turn.

He is at his best, however, in his treatment of Hinduism and Buddhism, which is fortunate, for these are the two great religious systems outside the west which clearly have the most to offer us in the way of spiritual truth.

It should be noted that his treatment of Christianity is wonderfully fresh and spontaneous. (It is as if someone like Huston Smith in every respect, but an Oriental, were to interpret Christianity in the same way Mr. Smith treats the great religions of the Orient.) He is especially convincing in his portrayal of the invincible joy and faith of the early Christians, still living in the generation or two after Christ. Here the book rises to one of its frequent peaks, and as a result the imaginative reader will have a vivid and unfading conception of the faith that transformed those early Christians into an irresistible band of world-movers.

All in all, a book to be recommended unreservedly.

Thank God For Life!

I thank Thee just for life!
The chance to live—
To be alive! So great Thy gift
If Thou dost nothing give
Beside, it is enough
To breathe Thy air,
To walk the mountain sod,
To feel the play of mighty winds,
To look Thee in the face,
And call Thee God!

— *Author unknown.*
(Sent by Rev. F. J. Compson).

Too late have I loved Thee, O Thou Beauty of ancient days! .... Thou didst call and shout, and burst my deafness. Thou didst flash, shine, and scatter my blindness. Thou didst breathe odors, and I drew in breath, and pant for Thee. I tasted, and I hunger and thirst for Thee. Thou didst touch me, and I am on fire for Thy peace.

— St. Augustine.

With our ears may we hear what is good.
With our eyes may we behold thy righteousness.
Tranquil in body, may we who worship thee find rest.

— Upanishads.

The Power of Thought—

If you desire with all your heart friendship with every race on earth, your thought, spiritual and positive, will spread; it will become the desire of others, growing stronger and stronger.

— *Baha'i Writings.*

NOTICES and COMMENTS

PROGRESS NOTES. Every so often a magazine, like an individual, reaches a stage when it feels itself on the verge of a new integration and self-adjustment to meet the challenge of its responsibilities. The last such turning point for FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER came nearly three years ago when our beloved founder, Carl Evans, passed away. The difficult transition period since then has been, we believe, successfully accomplished. We feel that FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER has now reached another definitive stage in its growth and that this issue is tangible evidence of our expectations.

Specifically, we point to the new size of the magazine, an increase of 4 pages over the size we have printed for the last seven years. We feel that the magazine is ready and equipped for such an enlargement and in the near future we hope to be able to increase the size still further. Early in February, when the annual meeting of the board of Fellowship in Prayer takes place, this matter among others will be discussed. The essentials of that meeting will be reported in our February issue...In the same connection is the problem of our office location, which for some time has been inadequate to serve properly the needs of the magazine and the Fellowship as a whole.

Beginning with this issue, we plan to have a regular Book Review section in each number and to devote an average of four pages to it. In addition, we are thinking of including a page of excerpts of interesting letters that come to our office. As a start, let us have your comments on this issue and your suggestions about the contents of future ones.

APPRECIATION. We extend a sincere and grateful hand of appreciation to our contributing editors and to all who helped in the preparation of this issue. Their cooperation and suggestions for the Christmas number were especially welcome.

SEASON'S GREETINGS. And now from all of us to all of you—a joyous Christmas season and the happiest of New Years. Let us give thanks for the blessings we received these past twelve months, and for the good deeds we were able to perform in the service of the Lord let us be humbly grateful.

FELLOWSHIP ADVISORS

EASTERN ZONE:

Maude H. Brodhead
Mrs. Mabel C. Burlingham
Florence S. Dustin
Mrs. Bennie Caroline Hall
Mrs. George F. Holl, Jr.
Irene Hulbert
Mrs. William Hung
Mrs. Frank W. Lovejoy

SOUTHERN ZONE:

Olga Lamkert
Emmy Lou Schweigert

CENTRAL ZONE:

Katharine L. Beech
Mrs. A. M. Davison
Karl W. Frey
Mrs. David William Harris
Harry Halsey Starrett

WESTERN ZONE:

Mrs. Zelma Dennis
Mrs. Warren P. Landon
Roy Wallace Thomas
Mrs. J. H. Titus
Mrs. Helen Dudley Young

FOREIGN ZONE:

Emilie, Lady Coote *(England)* Mrs. Mildred Seydell *(Belgium)*
S. R. Shafaq *(Iran)*

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

William Ernest Hocking
Carl E. Holmes
Alvin A. Jones
Myron B. Movsky
Sri Nachiketa
Swami Ritajananda
Mildred Seydell
S. R. Shafaq
Harry Halsey Starrett
Roy Wallace Thomas
W. J. Thompson
Ralph S. Thorn
Robert Wells Youngs

CONTRIBUTING ARTISTS

Edward C. Caswell
LaVerne Moritz

TRUSTEES and OFFICERS

*

Founder - Carl Allison Evans *(1880-1956)*

*

William, Hung, *President*

A. E. Johnson,
Mrs. Thomas M. Taylor,
Vice Presidents.

J. E. Thompson, *Treasurer*
Verall D. Wright,
Trustee.

Kathryn G. Brown, *Executive Secretary*

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace ..
Where there is hatred, let me sow love.
Where there is injury ..... pardon.
Where there is doubt ..... faith.
Where there is despair .... hope.
Where there is darkness ... light.
Where there is sadness .... joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled.....as to console,
To be understood.....as to understand,
To be loved.....as to love.

F O R

It is in giving, that we receive,
It is in pardoning, that we are pardoned,
It is in dying....that we are born to
eternal life.

— *St Francis.*

✠

Fellowship in Prayer
22 East 29th Street
New York 16, N. Y.

* *
*
* Send FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER to loved ones and friend
* To:
*
*
* From:
*
* *